ASLEF response to HS2 Review October 2019

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train drivers' union representing over 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems.

2. ASLEF has consistently supported proposals for high-speed rail in the UK. There is a clear need to increase capacity across the network, reduce travel times between major cities, and allow space for more freight to be moved by rail.

3. The main benefit of the planned HS2 scheme is unlocking capacity. The UK rail network is already operating at or close to full capacity, and the West Coast Mainline is operating at full capacity. This means there is no way to add additional paths, either for passenger or freight services, and the UK is missing opportunities to further decarbonise transport.

4. Currently transport is responsible for 33% of the UK's carbon dioxide emissions, but rail accounts for less than 2% of this. If more rail capacity was available the total carbon emissions would be reduced even further, with rail (particularly when electrified) having a significant impact.

5. In comparison to our close European counterparts, the UK is lagging behind in high speed rail. Spain and Germany both have over 3,000km of operational high-speed track and France 2,600. The UK currently has just 108km of high-speed rail on the HS1 route. Consequently passengers in other European countries are more likely to use rail to travel within the country whereas in the UK the majority of journeys are still made by road or, in the case of Scotland to London, air.

6. Since the opening of Eurostar, passenger numbers have risen and risen, reaching 11million in 2018. By 2014, the railway had already gained an 80% share of the travel market between London and Paris and London and Brussels. In contrast to this, between London and Edinburgh, air travel accounts for 70% of the market, with rail making up just 24%. It is clear that where high-speed rail is built, the passengers will come.

7. ASLEF has always maintained that the full benefits of HS2 will only be unlocked – and equitable – if it is delivered in full, including reaching Edinburgh and Glasgow as well as Heathrow in the south. Domestic air travel emits unnecessary carbon dioxide as well as

contributing to capacity issues at air hubs such as Heathrow. Switching passengers from air travel to high-speed rail would have a positive effect on the environment.

8. Passenger numbers on the main north to south rail routes continue to rise. Over the 10 years to 2018, the West Coast Mainline has seen an increase of nearly 10 million passengers, with almost treble the amount of journeys being made since the route was franchised in 1997.

9. The day-to-day operations of HS2 rail will mean long distance trains can run at high speeds on the new lines, leaving the existing WCML lines clear for stopping services. This will make it possible to increase the number and frequency of both types of services, adding significant capacity. While this would be welcome between London and Birmingham, the north of England and Scotland are also seeing rail services constantly at or over capacity and there is a need to increase the number of services operating between northern cities as well as between those cities and London.

10. The only way to do this is to unlock the high-speed capacity throughout the route, not just to Birmingham but throughout the north. A partially-completed high-speed railway would be disastrous both practically and in terms of reputation. Improving speed and capacity only between London and the midlands would lead to bottlenecks of passengers and freight forced to interchange at Birmingham with insufficient onward paths, and the public relations crisis of neglecting the needs of the north of England. A key objective of HS2 is to deliver regional rebalancing in the economy and connectivity. Stopping the project part-way and not continuing on to the north of England would be contrary to this objective.

11. As ASLEF stated in our original responses to the route consultations for HS2, over time the full potential of high-speed rail would be enhanced by extending the line to Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as linking it to Heathrow Airport in the South. High-speed rail is essential for future connectivity right across the country and it is important the we continue to innovate and expand the network.

12. Network Rail's Midlands Strategy Report predicts that growth from HS2 and improvements to links across the Midlands could take up to 36,000 lorries off the roads each year (with a projected increase in rail freight of 350% by 2043), lead to £500m of economic growth and have a positive impact on connectivity between Birmingham and East Midlands airports – the latter carrying more cargo each year than any other airport outside of London.

13. Transport for the North, in its Long Term Rail Strategy, has identified a clear requirement for additional capacity to reduce issues caused by long-distance and 'fast' services being unable to run at their full potential speeds due to being held behind stopping services. Benefits have also been shown to be possible by linking HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail effectively with the Port of Liverpool and connecting other freight interchange sites across the north of England.

14. Northern political leaders have also expressed strong support for HS2, saying it's vital that it is delivered in order to unlock potential economic growth across the region. Ros Jones,

Mayor of Doncaster, said "Delivering HS2 must not come at the expense of other vital rail investment in the north of measures to protect communities. That would be a betrayal of our region and the Government's commitment to rebalance the national economy… Passengers and services in our region are suffering now. We can't wait another 20 years to deliver much needed rail improvements." ASLEF believes that this once in a generation infrastructure project must go ahead alongside other vital investments. The state of the economy and the climate do not allow for half measures.

15. The UK has obligations under the Paris and Kyoto agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the government has pledged to reduce carbon emissions by 2030 to 57% of 1990 levels and to net zero by 2050. High-speed rail can and should play a large part in achieving these targets and going beyond them towards a low-carbon future. Efficient and comprehensive high-speed rail will lead to a reduction in the need for domestic air travel, as well as moving freight to rail from roads. Rail freight emits on average 76% less CO2 emissions than the equivalent road journey, and must be supported and provided for within plans for the rail network.

16. Rail freight needs paths and connectivity to be an efficient and viable alternative to road. HS2 operating a full route, including links to Scotland, and connecting key freight interchanges in the Midlands and North, would provide this much-needed capacity and allow rail freight to grow and thrive.

17. For passenger services, links between HS2 and HS1, along with easy interchange between high-speed and other local and regional services, will provide a viable alternative to private car use, along with freeing up paths for efficient commuter rail in the Midlands and the north of England.

18. High-speed rail links through the Midlands and north of England, and on to Scotland, will unlock economic growth throughout the country. The UK Government has acknowledged the need to rebalance the economy, which is currently skewed towards London and the South East. Completing the full HS2 route is a vital part of bringing growth to other regions, as better rail links benefit both business and leisure travellers, increasing productivity and improving connectivity between economic centres.

19. Other secondary economic benefits will also be realised, including reduced road congestion (which currently costs the UK economy approximately £8bn per year), fewer delays and less congested commuter rail routes.

20. ASLEF is fully committed to the development of high-speed rail in the UK. The benefits to communities, the economy and the environment are very clear. It is also clear that this is a time-limited opportunity, and must not be allowed to languish. Large-scale infrastructure projects are costly and take many years but the benefits are plain to see and will benefit the country for decades to come.